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NEWS

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PRESENTS OF PREPAREDNESS

HELP HAPPY HOLIDAYS LAST ALL YEAR

Families can start a tradition of holiday and year 'round safety and preparedness this year if they shop for supplies to stock an emergency kit. There are many useful, safety-oriented gifts that are affordable, even fun, and just might be needed if there are snow-related power outages this winter or heavy rains and flooding in the spring, summer or fall.

By thinking a little outside the box, holiday giving can mean holiday packages filled with supplies for emergency preparedness kits or handy tools for household and travel safety. Local hardware and department stores and catalogues offer practical, useful, and entertaining items that any family can use in an emergency. Delaware Emergency Management Agency officials encourage families and friends to use the holiday season to share the importance of being prepared for storms, power outages, floods and other disruptive events.

Even though the Delmarva Peninsula was spared serious effects from the 2009 tropical storm season, early nor'easters, such as the winds and rains of Veterans Day weekend and early December, remind everyone that not all damaging weather has impact on us in the form of hurricanes. Bad weather events don't always go by the calendar. Make a plan, build a kit and be informed all year long can be a part of holiday activities this year.

Bright gifts of light are always welcome and the variety of flashlights and lanterns that are available come in all sizes and styles. Flashlights that don't require batteries are common and light devices can be found to hold in your hand, fasten to the brim of a cap, hang on a key chain or clip to a jacket zipper pull.

The ambiance of scented candles can even be enjoyed without the risk of open flames with wax candles that have flickering battery operated wicks.

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Many emergency or camping lanterns and portable radios include adapters for charging cell phones. Some are powered by cranking and some include solar energy collection panels. When shopping for portable radios, it is always a good idea to find one that receives National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather station signals. NOAA Weather Radio is the voice of the National Weather Service. All-purpose and weather radios that have battery back-up and a hand-crank power generator are available in most local electronic and hardware stores and come in a range of affordable prices. The weather radio makes a good companion to local radio and television bulletins and updates.

A combination crank-powered radio and flashlight/lantern makes a great gift for those family members or friends that might not have the means to fully stock an emergency supply kit.

Being prepared for emergencies is serious, but DEMA officials remind the public that you can have quality family time with a serious subject. Family planning and assembling supplies for emergencies allows everyone to add items that they think are important. Our children can take a role and be an integral part of the team as the entire family creates a plan for safety and peace of mind. Assembling a gift of basic emergency supplies for someone in need also sets a great example for giving.

Even though unwrapping a smoke alarm may be about as exciting as finding that quality manual can opener in the stocking, one can save your life and the other can give you access to soup for you and food for your pets if the electricity is out.

Maybe Norman Rockwell didn't envision a holiday scene of families gathered around the crank radio, listening for news of school closings, but useful preparedness gifts and some good cookies can make a big contribution to holiday high spirits. Be imaginative, be creative, but be safe and prepared this holiday season.

Remember, the first 72 hours is on you: Every household should have enough supplies to sustain people and pets for at least three days in case of emergencies that impede travel and interrupt power. Emergency management officials suggest extending your emergency supplies and being prepared to be self-sustaining for up to four days to ensure that you are safe and comfortable while responders take care of those in dire need.

For more information on creating a family emergency plan and stocking a kit, visit the DEMA website, www.dema.delaware.gov, the Citizen Corps website, www.delawarecitizencorps.org or www.fema.gov and www.ready.gov.

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